

VZCZCXRO9743
OO RUEHDBU RUEHPW
DE RUEHBUL #1896/01 1591137
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 081137Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8571
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 4149
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 3649

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 001896

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN
OSD FOR SHIVERS
CENTCOM FOR CG CFC-A. CG CJTF-82 POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/08/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: POLITICAL OR PERSONAL? TWO FEMALE JOURNALISTS
MURDERED THIS WEEK

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Carol Rodley for reasons
1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) The June 5 assassination of Zakia Zaki marked the second murder of a female journalist in Afghanistan in a week. On June 1, Shakiba Sanga Amaaj, anchorwoman for Shamsad TV, was similarly gunned down at her home in Kabul. While not directly connected, the two murders have sent shock waves through Afghanistan's media community and point to the continuing threat faced by Afghan journalists generally and the unique vulnerability of female journalists in particular. Rumors abound as to whether Zaki and Amaaj were killed by extremists due to their public profiles as female journalists or due to personal animosities with political rivals or even by their own family members. Either way, both murders can be categorized as a response to these women stepping outside socially-accepted norms for women's behavior (in the personal and public arena) and are part of a larger, more recent trend towards silencing and intimidating journalists, particularly in the central provinces. End summary.

JUNE 5 MURDER OF ZAKIA ZAKI, MANAGER OF PEACE RADIO

12. (C) Zakia Zaki was shot 7 times while sleeping after three men allegedly broke into her home north of Kabul. Immensely popular within her community, Zaki held three prominent positions in her hometown in Parwan province: She was headmaster of the local girls high school, director of a cultural and community center assisted with funding through USAID's rule of law project, and owner of Radio Peace, an independent radio station that was the first radio station established during the anti-Taliban resistance movement in the North. Zaki, who reportedly worked with Ahmed Shah Massoud and the Northern Alliance during the resistance, had been the station's first radio presenter. Through Radio Peace, Zaki was reportedly an outspoken critic of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar as well as corruption by local warlords and provincial

government officials. Aside from her work with Radio Peace, Zaki had represented Parwan in the Constitutional Loya Jirga, then unsuccessfully ran for a seat in the current Parliament. Those who worked with her in the media and civil society circles describe her as an amazing woman who was loved by many in her community.

13. (C) Speculation continues as to whether Zaki was murdered by extremist elements who disapproved of her role as an outspoken female journalist, by local strongmen who wanted to send a powerful message to curb her and other journalists' criticisms of their activities, or by agents of her political rival and current member of Parliament, Samia Sadat. Sadat beat out Zaki for a mutually-contested seat in the 2005 Parliamentary elections. In early 2006, Sadat narrowly escaped an assassination attempt against her for which she blamed Zaki. The following February journalist Abdul Qudoos, who worked under Zaki at Radio Peace, was arrested for plotting the murder. After great outcry from the Afghan and international media community, who insisted Qudoos' arrest was merely an attempt by local government officials to silence prominent journalists, all charges were dropped. Abdul Qudoos was released in February 2007, after spending nearly one year in jail. Nevertheless, Sadat's suspicion of Zaki's connection to the plot was widely known. On May 30, 2007, a second assassination attempt against Sadat again proved unsuccessful when her vehicle was hit by an IED while driving through Parwan. Just one week later, another murder attempt was launched, but this time Zaki was the intended

KABUL 00001896 002 OF 003

target and her attackers were successful. Given the history between the two women, many journalists have suggested Zaki was killed due to her rivalry with Sadat. However, Rahimullah Samander of the Afghanistan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA), who knew Zaki well and has spoken with her family since the murder, told POLOFF his own theory that extremists or local warlords are behind the assassination attempts against both Zaki and Sadat but are playing off of their history of rivalry to evade investigation by police officials.

JUNE 1 MURDER OF SKAKIBA SANGA AMAJ, SHAMSAD TV ANCHOR

14. (C) Just four days before the murder of Zaki, another well-known female TV personality, Pashto-language "Shamsad TV" anchorwoman Skakiba Sanga Amaj, was also shot and killed outside her home in Kabul. As in Zaki's murder, there is wide speculation as to whether Amaj was gunned down by extremists who disapproved of her role as a woman in the public eye, or as an "honor killing" at the hands of family members reportedly angered over her refusal to abide by an agreement to marry a distant relative made when Shakikba was a young girl. Amaj was rumored to have been romantically involved with a co-worker at Shamsad TV, further incensing the family's ire against her. Media reports and journalists who worked closely with Amaj assert that she had been receiving threats from unidentified persons admonishing her to stop working as an anchor for Shamsad. However, during several media interviews, Amaj's father blamed her relatives for the murder and denied that she had received any threats before her death. On June 7 police officials arrested two men, identified by Amaj's father, in connection with her murder but have not indicated whether the men are related to Amaj.

MORE MEDIA INTIMIDATION IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCES

15. (C) Media contacts report at least three other cases of intimidation of journalists in the central provinces (Kabul, Parwan, and Kapisa) within the last month. While not directly connected to the assassinations of Amaj and Zaki, Rahimullah Samander of AIJA asserts that these isolated incidents are part of a growing trend in which strongmen or extremists in Afghanistan's central provinces are sending a clear signal to journalists to tread carefully in their reporting of local events.

16. (C) On May 24, unknown gunmen shot Abdul Manaf, a 23-year-old journalist working for a small independent radio station in the Nijrab district of Kapisa province. Manaf survived with bullet wounds to his thigh but maintains that Nijrab police have been uncooperative in the pending investigation. On May 30, Ariana TV reporter Shakib Dost was allegedly harassed and intimidated by security officials at Parliament due to disparaging remarks he had made of MPs while on camera earlier that day. In a separate incident in Kabul Province, the owner of a fledgling radio station in the Karabagh district has reported being harassed, beaten and having his equipment confiscated by District Police Chief Khwaja Abdul Rahim. Kabul Governor Hajji Din Mohammad and Minister of Information and Culture Abdul Karim Khoram have reportedly tried to intervene in this case, but according to AIJA, the equipment has not been returned to the radio station, nor has any investigation of Rahim's role in the incident been conducted.

COMMENT

KABUL 00001896 003 OF 003

17. (C) The lives and eventual deaths of journalists Zakia Zaki and Shakiba Sanga Amaj have played out like the Indian soap operas that are so popular among Afghan TV viewers, and in real life, attempts to untangle the motives behind these women's murders illustrate the futility of trying to separate the personal from the political in local Afghan politics. (In this context, it is worth noting that to date, the May 18, 2005, assassination of Tolo TV's female music-television host Shaima Razayee, who was well-known as one of the first Afghan women to drop the burqa and don western attire on local television, remains unsolved.) Whether or not their roles as female journalists were the primary impetus behind their deaths, their assassinations have sent a powerful message to other women around Afghanistan. For even if their deaths were purely personal, Amaj and Zaki's murderers knew that their notoriety as journalists would ensure widespread coverage of their intended message that those who step outside the boundaries prescribed to women in Afghanistan - professionally or personally - face dire consequences.

WOOD